



Senate

Paper Title	Semester Based Exams
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to consider the paper on semester based exams.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	<p>Overview At its last meeting, Senate discussed the significant rise in exams being held across the institution (from 50,000 in 2010-11 to an expected 83,000 in 2017-18) and the practical implications of this increase. Senate agreed to facilitate further discussion on semester based exams. EQSB considered the models in the attached paper along with any issues and opportunities they may present. EQSB agreed that splitting the examination period would be beneficial to the student experience and would alleviate the stress of preparing for multiple examinations.</p> <p>Comparison with other institutions Excluding QMUL, and Oxford and Cambridge (which are not comparable), 17 of the remaining 21 Russell Group institutions offer semester-based examinations. The following Russell Group institutions do offer semester based examinations: Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Exeter, Glasgow, Imperial, KCL, Leeds, Liverpool, LSE, Manchester, Newcastle, Nottingham, Queen’s University Belfast, Sheffield, Southampton, and York.</p> <p>The following Russell Group institutions do not offer semester based examinations: Warwick (but does have three exam periods), Birmingham, Durham, and UCL. A number of institutions also hold exams during the evening and at weekends. Holding evening and weekend examinations could be considered as an alternative to extending the academic year.</p> <p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The delayed start to teaching in Semester B would create an opportunity to use the teaching estate for other activities, such as compressed learning, short courses and CPD. - It could lead to a reduction in the number of external venues required during the examinations period. In addition to being popular with students this would release funds which could be used to invest in resourcing evening/weekend examinations. - There would be an opportunity for students to be given feedback following the Semester A assessment period. This could be a useful tool in preparing them for their summer exams.

	<p>Issues under investigation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It will be important to clarify expectations around the nature and timing of feedback to students following the Semester A assessment period, whether for formal written exams or other forms of assessment. - Programmes that do not set formal written exams in January will need to clarify how students are spending the time, between coursework and other self-directed learning. - An equality impact assessment would be undertaken as part of the process taking into consideration students who may have religious commitments. - If the revision week is removed, there may be practical implications as this week provides time for exam rooms to be set up. <p>Other points to note In the proposed models is it assumed that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exam boards would remain unchanged, with results from the Semester A assessment period being marked provisional until the summer. - Semester A resits would be held during the late summer resit period and not during the summer.
<p>Questions for Senate to consider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would the impact be on student experience? - Are there any other implications of semester based exams that may require further consideration (ie. Feedback)? - Are there any other practical implications of evening/weekend exams that may require further consideration (ie. on students with special examinations arrangements, religious observations, invigilators and academic staff)?
<p>Regulatory/statutory reference points</p>	<p>Academic Regulations, QMUL</p>
<p>Strategy and risk</p>	<p>2.01 Student Experience</p>
<p>Reporting/consideration route for the paper</p>	<p>Consultation to follow.</p>
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<p>Sponsor</p>	<p>Jonathan Morgan, Academic Registrar and Council Secretary</p>

Semester Based Exams – Options

The main assessment period at QMUL is a six week block of examinations held during the summer term. 42% of examinations are from modules which were completed in Semester A, with 46% from Semester B and 12% from year-long modules. At a recent meeting of Senate it was agreed to explore options for splitting the assessment period on a semester basis, in order to reduce the current gap between teaching and assessment, and potentially to reduce the overall burden of assessment and feedback, for Semester B modules. The options below provide some suggestions on ways in which semester-based examinations could be incorporated into the academic year.

Sustained growth in student numbers provides a further reason to review the way that the main assessment period is organised. In 2016–17 there were 73,000 sittings in total; in 2017–18 there are predicted to be 84,000. It is becoming increasingly difficult for schools and institutes to meet marking deadlines, as more examinations need to be scheduled later on in the assessment period. There is also insufficient capacity for further growth in student numbers, unless we adopt a different approach. There are four methods through which this could be done, none of which are mutually exclusive of each other.

- a) Increase the number of seats, by hiring more external venues. Suitable venues in the local area are very limited and students have expressed a preference for sitting their examinations on campus.
- b) Introduce a third examination sitting each day, Monday–Friday (for example, a three-hour examination in the morning, followed by two two-hour sittings in the early and later afternoon), or introduce additional sittings at weekends. The former option would require greater standardisation of examination durations than at present.
- c) Extend the length of the assessment period.
- d) Explore alternative methods of assessment that place fewer demands on physical resources.

Option 1 – 6 week exam period

The existing six-week examination period could be split into two blocks. Option 1a could involve two weeks of examinations in January and four weeks in the early summer; Option 1b involves three weeks in January and three weeks in the early summer. These options have the benefit of maintaining the length of the academic year as it currently stands. Option 1a is more attractive than Option 1b, because it would have less impact on intercollegiate teaching and on programmes that do not require formal examinations in January. These options would require a significant increase in capacity through one or more of the methods outlined above.

Option 2 - 7 week exam period (without revision week)

Option 2 addresses the issue of capacity by extending the assessment period to seven weeks, but maintains the current length of the academic year by removing revision week. Accordingly, Option 2a is a two-week period of examinations in January and a five-week period in the early summer; Option 2b is a three-week examination period in early January and a four-week period in the early summer. Option 2a is more attractive than Option 2b for the reasons stated above. However, the removal of time for revision and independent study between the end of teaching and the beginning of the second examination period would be problematic.

Option 3 – 7 week exam period (with revision week)

Option 3 corresponds to Option 2, but with revision week retained. This would extend the academic year by one week, with potential implications for the timing of graduation ceremonies and Late Summer Resits.

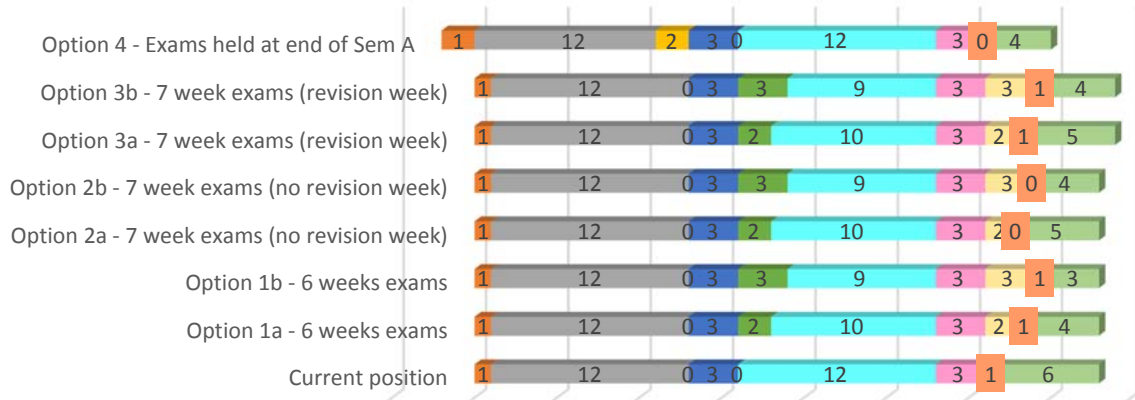
Option 4 – Exams held at the end of Semester A

Option 4 deals with the desire to hold exams at the end of Semester A teaching and before the Christmas break. This option would only be achievable if the start of the academic year was brought forward by 2 weeks to the start of September and the late summer resit examinations were moved into July to enable marking and exam boards to take place ahead of the start of the new academic year. With the removal of revision week to mirror the semester A experience, the main summer exam period of 4 weeks would be completed before the end of May.

Other considerations:

- Subject Examination Boards would continue to take place only in June / July, meaning that students would receive provisional marks for examinations taken in January.
- Schools and institutes would need to consider and define how students are expected to use the January assessment period, whether they would be sitting examinations or not.
- Schools and institutes would need to consider the nature and timing of feedback following the January assessment period.
- The fact that there are large numbers of associate students who take a diverse range of modules results in greater complexity in the examination timetable. These pressures might be alleviated by exploring different approaches to assessment for this cohort of students.
- Given that Student Finance England requires early notification of semester dates, any changes to the current arrangements would need to take effect from 2019–20.
- The creation of a two-week period in early January during which the teaching estate is only partially utilised could present opportunities to pursue other activities, such as CPD and block teaching.

Semester Based Exams - Options



- Welcome Week
- Semester 1 Teaching
- Semester A Exams (Dec)
- Christmas Break
- Semester A Exams
- Semester 2 Teaching
- Easter Break
- Semester 2 Teaching (cont'd)
- Revision Week
- Semester 2 Exams